

Front Lines in Education

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Consumer Intelligence

The development of consumer intelligence is widely accepted as a desirable outcome of the program of secondary education. The Educational Policies Commission, for example, lists as one of its ten imperative needs of youth that "all youth need to know how to purchase and use goods and services intelligently." Many high schools are endeavoring to supply this understanding through work in consumer education, offered either in special courses or as units of work in existing courses. The Consumer Education Study of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, of which Thomas H. Briggs is director and Fred T. Wilhelms was assistant director, has been active in promoting work in this area for several years. As a part of the Study itself, the Association has published a number of bulletins useful in planning and carrying forward consumer education. Descriptions of some of the more promising programs have been made available by Mr. Wilhelms. The following accounts briefly summarize some of these efforts.

Sewanhaka High School, Floral Park, New York. Consumer education is given specific attention in at least five departments of the high school. In Home Economics, the girls are given instruction in better buymanship in products used in the home. Shopping trips are made and the pupils learn to read labels and evaluate graded materials. In the ninth grade social studies classes approximately three weeks instruction in consumer education is given. Twelfth grade social studies pupils also work on units in the consumer area. The English department guides pupils in the wise selection of literature and reading material. Previously, the commercial department offered a course called Consumer Education, but this had to be dis-

continued when a course in Distributive Occupations was added to the department. Now various aspects of consumer education are given attention in several of the commercial subjects. The department of Industrial Arts and Vocational Education has a broad program in the general area of consumer education. In the regular course of instruction, attention is given to the selection and purchase of machines and tools for a home workshop or a business enterprise; social legislation which affects consumers is considered; selection of consumer goods, such as furniture, automobiles, household appliances, is considered in appropriate classes. A number of other aspects of the vocational program also relate to consumer activities.

Los Angeles City Schools. In Los Angeles, consumer education is provided on the elementary, secondary, and adult levels. The program is not uniform in the schools, but there are various points of emphasis according to the interests and philosophy of school principals and teachers.

In the elementary schools teachers use opportunities such as a visit to the market, a study of prize offers made over the radio, a class lunch-loan fund, and others that may be used to train young consumers.

In the high schools consumer economics is an elective unit of the senior problems course. The course handbook includes outlines for units of five, ten, or twenty weeks in length, with emphasis upon economics and personal money management.

A unique feature of the course is the class survey. At the first meeting each student fills out a prepared form with information as to father's occupation, family buying habits, and student's previous experience in handling money and buying goods. No information is required of the student reluctant to give it. An added feature may be a check list indicating the

student's desired standard of living. These sheets are used in planning the course and in bringing home to the student how much effort on his part will be necessary to meet the anticipated standard of living.

The outstanding feature of consumer courses on the adult level is the way in which they are keyed to the needs and wishes of students. The three teachers meet regularly to plan the course cooperatively and to pool their information. As the course is thus in a constant state of revision, the same students—housewives—attend the day classes year after year to learn the latest developments.

Placer Union High School, Auburn, California. In this high school consumer education is considered in homemaking, science, and social science courses. The work in homemaking illustrates the approach used. In food classes the girls have experiences in preparing market orders, shopping for the food, and figuring the cost of the meal. When they are responsible for the preparation of meals, attention is given to various features to consider in buying food, and also to the use of packaged food in comparison to preparation of such foods by the individual. The use of various types of cooking utensils is discussed. Considerable attention in the clothing classes is given to best buys in various kinds of yard goods. The girls learn what to consider in buying clothing and how to take care of various articles of clothing. In advanced classes study is made of various brands of house furnishings and linens and the relative merits of various articles is considered. Use is made of field trips to both stores and homes, of movies, and of circulars provided by advertisers.

Santa Cruz High School, Santa Cruz, California. A course in consumer education is offered in the Santa Cruz High School. One of the interesting activities of this class is a buying project which each pupil develops. The instructor has developed mimeographed guide sheets which the pupils utilize in carrying forward their buying projects. The student selects some product which he personally would be interested in buying. He then uses at least

five sources in obtaining information on the merits of various makes of the product. All of this information is brought together in the form of an analysis sheet in which the student evaluates the various sources of information which he has used. His information is assembled in a loose-leaf notebook and is presented to the class.

Cincinnati High School. For a number of years the Cincinnati schools have offered consumer education courses in the high school. Recently the work was expanded from a one-semester to a one-year course. Teachers are especially trained in consumer education. About 300 pupils were enrolled in the classes last year. Cincinnati approaches the course from the point of view that quantity in buying is largely affected by income, but quality is governed by taste. Since the teachers feel that there is a relationship between choice making and human welfare and that choices are influenced by what others buy, a general training is given in buymanship concurrently with the teaching of the principles of art with a view to raising the level of taste. Consumer education is regarded as a field in which art principles can be given an authentic setting; therefore, the experiences necessary to the development of discrimination are furnished by means of purchasing projects and visits to shops and museums where pupils examine and accept or discard by standards and not by labels alone. Purchases are analyzed as to suitability, material values, craftsmanship, and design. The course consists of basic units concerned with the formulation of both an individual and social philosophy, stressing individual responsibility for wise choice making and units on buymanship and consumer-producer relations.

Project in Applied Economics. Of course, one of the most extensive projects in improving consumership is the Project in Applied Economics which has been carried on under the sponsorship of the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation at the Universities of Kentucky, Florida, and Vermont. Much has appeared in professional literature about this project, but one fur-

ther example will illustrate some of the work which has been carried on as part of this endeavor.

Geneva is a small rural community in central Florida. Citrus fruit growing and cattle raising are the principal industries, but because of general economic conditions and the closing of the packing houses, the community was becoming poverty stricken in 1940. It was at this time that the school joined in the Project. The faculty, as a result of planning in a summer workshop at the University of Florida, decided to develop a school-community program designed to improve the living standards of the people of the community. The principal feature of the program was the development of home projects by the pupils of the school. Two afternoons each week were set aside for carrying on these activities. Included in the home projects were such things as gardening, poultry and livestock raising, home improvement, cooking, sewing, and community recreation. On one of the two afternoons of the week the teachers visited at the homes, talking with the parents, making suggestions for carrying on the home projects. During the first year some of the parents were fearful that the school was departing too much from formal teaching which might result in poor academic achievement. As a result of this community unrest, home visitation by the teachers was eliminated from the program. However at the end of the first year standard achievement tests were given and the pupils at Geneva ranked above the rest of the county in class medians. This convinced the parents, and the entire community has supported the program wholeheartedly since that time. During the seven years since this project started, the standard of living of the community has been raised. Every home has its garden and a flock of chickens. Many families produce milk, butter, and meat; and increased interest in home improvement has resulted in painting, remodeling, redecorating, and landscaping many homes. The entire school has participated in this school-community program and many of the regular activities of the school are correlated with these community activi-

ties. School classes take many field trips, and the teachers visit in many of the homes where they work with both pupils and parents.

A Social Studies Program. The New York State Education Department has just issued a bulletin to guide schools in the development on an experimental basis of a two-year program in social studies.

The two-year program is built around selected units of work in world backgrounds of American history, and in American history and problems. The first half of the course places the development of America in its world setting and seeks to give a broad understanding of world developments that are desirable for an adequate understanding of American history. The second half of the course gives attention to selected problems of American life. The guiding concept in the organization and selection of the units is that "national histories are unintelligible within their own time and space limits. It is impossible to have any adequate understanding of our own country if we know only the course of events since the coming of the Europeans to the western hemisphere."

Defining the Characteristics of Good Schools. In its wide-spread efforts to improve the quality of education in the state, the Virginia State Department of Education has recently issued several publications which are the accumulation of intensive study and discussion by various educational groups in the state. The Division of Elementary Education has published in tentative form a statement, *Characteristics of a Good Elementary School*. This publication brings together the deliberations of conference and workshop groups who have been studying the problem for the past two years. The publication is intended to be used experimentally by future conference groups and by local school officials. On a basis of their evaluation of the publication it will be revised and issued in permanent form later. The publication accepts as a responsibility of a good elementary school

the guidance of "the child in his total development as he grows into worthy membership in a democracy."

To carry on adequately this function, the Virginia people feel that a good elementary school will have these characteristics:

1. Continuous cooperative planning
2. Continuous personal and professional growth of a qualified staff
3. A program of work based on an understanding of the child and upon the recognition of the requirements of competent citizenship in a democracy
4. A program which improves the quality of community living
5. A plant and facilities which further the educational program.

In helping the citizens of Virginia think through their educational problems, the State Department has also issued a thought-provoking statement, *A Comprehensive Program of Education for Virginia's Public Schools*. Consideration is given to desirable subject offerings for a five year high school program. The problems of a small high school are considered and recommendations are made for the optimum size of high schools. The work of the elementary school is also considered and recommendations likewise are made for improvement of the program and for consolidation of elementary schools.

As a third phase of its work to better define the functions of the school, the Department has issued a printed bulletin entitled, *When They Start to School*. This publication was issued to help parents and teachers think through the prob-

lems of guiding young children in making satisfactory adjustments to school living. The publication is cleverly illustrated and interestingly written.

New Curriculum Publications

New Jersey State Education Department—*Recommended Activities for Industrial Arts Classes in the Secondary Schools*, 27 p.

The Classroom Teacher Can Help the Handicapped Child, School Bulletin No. 12, 1947, 62 p.

Education for Family Life in the Primary Grades, Elementary School Bulletin No. 13, 1948, 29 p., Trenton, New Jersey

Alabama State Education Department—*Better Use of Textbooks*, Bulletin 1948, No. 4, 103 p., Montgomery, Alabama

New York State Education Department—*Driver Education and Training*, A Syllabus for Secondary Schools, No. 1348, 1948, 50 p.

A Guide for Planning the Art Program, Bureau of Curriculum Development, Division of Secondary Education, 1948, mimeographed.

A Tentative Reorganization of the Science Program for the Junior High School Grades, Bureau of Curriculum Development, Division of Secondary Education, 1948, mimeographed.

Tenth Year Mathematics (tentative), Mathematics Syllabus Committee, 1948 Revision, mimeographed.

Eleventh Year Mathematics (tentative), Mathematics Syllabus Committee, 1948 Revision, mimeographed, Albany, New York.

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